

## Drinking water research launches

### WATER

\$8M, 5-year program focuses on local health risks associated with perfluorinated chemicals from firefighting foams and other sources and discuss the involvement of Cape Cod communities in the research process.

**By Geoff Spillane**

[gspillane@capecodonline.com](mailto:gspillane@capecodonline.com)

HYANNIS — An \$8 million, five-year federally-funded research program focused on the health risks of perfluorinated chemicals — or PFASs — in drinking water was launched in Hyannis on Monday, and much of the research will be conducted on Cape Cod.

The STEEP (Sources, Transport, Exposure and Effects of PFASs) Superfund Program Research Center is a collaborative effort between the University of Rhode Island, Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Silent Spring Institute.

Funding for the project was provided through a grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Cape Cod, along with the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic, have been designated as the two focus areas for research for the project.

More than 100 people packed into the hearing room at Barnstable Town Hall Monday to hear scientists from the three institutions provide an overview of the project

The Cape, particularly Hyannis and areas near Joint Base Cape Cod, has been affected by the discovery of the target chemicals in its water supplies in recent years.

Public health advisories for the Hyannis water system have been issued twice since 2015 after levels of the perfluorinated chemicals PFOS and PFOA were detected above the Environmental Protection Agency's health advisory threshold.

**SEE WATER, A4**

## Drinking water research launches

### WATER

**From Page A1**

The chemicals are typically found in the types of firefighting foams that have been used in the past

School of Public Health.

The chemicals can take years to be removed from a person's body and they can be retained in organs, says Grandjean, making them easily transferred from mothers to children through the placenta and breast milk.

at the Barnstable County Fire and Rescue Training Academy and the Barnstable Municipal Airport. They can also be found in a multitude of consumer products, ranging from nonstick cookware to stain and water repellent clothing.

“We’re a committed partner,” Barnstable Town Manager Mark Ells said at the start of the meeting.

STEEP activities on the Cape will include: testing of private wells for PFASs; studying how the chemicals enter groundwater from firefighting foams used at Joint Base Cape Cod; field testing new methods to detect the chemicals in surface waters; and engaging with residents and local officials to share research finding and address local concerns, according to organizers.

The goals of the program are to determine the extent of the chemicals in groundwater, determine methods to reduce exposure and explore use of other compounds that could safely replace them, according to Rainer Lohmann, a professor of Oceanography at URI and leader of the STEEP program.

“I’ll look at them from a medical viewpoint,” said Dr. Philippe Grandjean of Harvard’s T.H. Chan

While Grandjean believes the cancer risk from the chemicals is negligible, he expressed concern about their effects on the immune system, pregnancy outcomes, liver disease, endocrine disruption and metabolic changes.

Grandjean has been studying a group of nearly 500 children in the Faroe Islands since birth nearly a decade ago, and is tracking the levels of the compounds in their bodies to determine the effects of prenatal and postnatal exposures.

Faroe Island residents are known for seafood, including whale meat, being a staple of their diet.

During a question-and-answer session, Grandjean was asked if STEEP plans to conduct any post-mortem studies on the Cape to determine if the compounds contributed to a person’s death.

“No, we won’t do any postmortems,” he said.  
“Our goal is to keep you alive.”

— *Follow Geoff Spillane on Twitter:*  
*@GSpillaneCCT.*